

ESPER GENESIS

HEROIC SCI-FI ROLEPLAYING

THE LONG WINTER



EGCC 01-05

ESPER GENESIS:
**CRUCIBLE
CORPS**



EPISODE FIVE OF
**SHADOW
OF THE
ZEPHYR**



THE LONG WINTER

Brutality and betrayal take center stage as the team is caught in the midst of a conflict between former allies. Friend and foe must be chosen while being pursued by a powerful enemy.

Part Five of the Shadow of the Zephyr series.

A 4-Hour Initiate Tier Adventure for Three to Seven Characters

Optimized for APL 4

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Long Winter*, an ESPER GENESIS™ adventure, part of the official Esper Genesis Crucible Corps™ organized play campaign and the *Shadow of the Zephyr*™ storyline season.

This adventure takes place aboard the Hespera Research Station, a Zephyr Corp space research hub near Silrayne Prime in the Tessara system.

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st-4th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 4**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Zephyr Corp's Hespera space hub orbits near Silrayne Prime. The station is a secret research facility hidden at the center of ancient ship graveyard, remnants of a great space battle. The facility is dedicated to studying an unknown alien artifact and developing bio-engineered life forms.

Zephyr Corp attempted to reverse engineer the artifact to create an amalgamation of organic and machine life with the help of the station's advanced AI. During the experiments, a hacker going by the name Abraxas broke into the station's data frame hoping to find dirt on Zephyr Corp as an act of revenge, but he dropped the station's digital defense network during his intrusion. The artifact, no longer contained, melded with the station's AI to form a sentient technovirus calling itself

the Long Winter, which went about by shutting off the environmental controls, decompressing the Hespera. It also possessed the Hespera's automatons and drones, slaughtering the remaining personnel or experimenting on them, turning them into bio-machine horrors. The station was severely damaged during the purge and the surviving drones are busy with emergency repairs.

Abraxas, his connection cut and unable to retrieve the sensitive data he sought to steal, has now turned to hiring mercenaries to board the station and manually capture the research and purge all other copies in hopes of bringing down Zephyr Corp and enacting his revenge. To this end, he contacts the characters, offering them money and a forge enhanced item. They are to board a Zephyr Corp shuttle scheduled to bring parts to the station. Abraxas is unaware of what he has inadvertently unleashed on the station and awaits the mercenaries.

However, Abraxas wasn't the only one watching Hespera. A black-ops agent named Arisa Angel has been monitoring the station, assessing the situation to determine if the research could be used as insurance against her ruthless boss, Baludan. While loyal to Zephyr Corp, she views Baludan as too dangerous an individual to be left a threat. As soon as the station went offline, Arisa sent in her mercenaries to secure the place, a group of matokai warriors known as Ladon's Teeth. The warriors were ambushed by drones and bio-horrors after they disembarked from their shuttle. Most were slain but a few managed to make it to 2. Engineering and Environmental Controls where they make a desperate last stand.



LOCATION AND NPC SUMMARY

The following NPCs and locations feature prominently in this adventure. Each NPC and location should have an entry with a phonetic pronunciation and one–three sentences describing them.

Arisa Angel (AH-ree-sah). A Zephyr Corp agent torn between doing her job and uncovering what her boss, Baludan, is hiding. She is a former friend of Garland's, at one time his teammate in a covert ops military group. When working outside of Zephyr Corp purview, she goes by the name Unrisen Angel.

Garland (GAHR-lund). Kesh cyber–security specialist who now goes by the name Abraxas. His name and reputation ruined by those who hunt him, he often works missions from within the SIM under several codenames until he can clear his name and get his revenge.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The adventure is broken down into 3 parts:

Part 1. The hacker Abraxas sends the characters to Silrayne Prime to infiltrate a secret research station called Hespera, a small Zephyr Corp space facility. The team boards Hespera Station and finds the research lab compromised. The characters explore several different sectors of the laboratory and discover a Zephyr Corp security team has arrived before them but has been nearly wiped.

Part 2. The characters must choose to ally between two agents competing for the same goal by different methods.

Part 3. The team must complete three mission goals, retrieve a copy of the data core from the helm, find a copy of Hespera's research in the lab hub, and destroy Hespera station.

CHOOSING ALLIES AND ENEMIES

In this adventure, the characters will come across competing factions, both seeking similar goals.

Garland's Hired Mercenaries: Garland works as a contact for the characters to infiltrate Hespera station, but only after he accidentally released a deadly viral AI the station was researching, killing everyone onboard. He is unaware of the consequences of his actions. He is an idealist.

Arisa Angel's Corporate Security: Arisa has dispatched a group of matokai warriors to secure the station. If the characters prove competent, she may offer them a job to help her take down her boss. However, she doesn't want anything about Hespera leaked, including its research or the unfortunate incident aboard. This puts her in direct opposition of Garland, who wants the information for revenge and blackmail.

ROLEPLAYING ARISA ANGEL (UNRISEN ANGEL)

Arisa is an ambitious corporate operative who specializes in black ops. For a time, she had worked closely with a prodigal hacker named Garland before he was given a burn notice by the corporation. She seeks to move–up the ranks of Zephyr, but she fears the ruthlessness of her current boss, Baludan. She is working to gain insurance and allies should the time come to move against him.

- **Ideal:** "I have seen what happens to those who are powerless."
- **Bond:** "I want to be part of a strong organization."
- **Flaw:** "I don't trust others easily."

ROLEPLAYING GARLAND (ABRAXAS)

Garland was a hacker and digital securities expert for a covert military unit until his commanding officer framed and burned him because he knew too much, guaranteeing he couldn't bring his skills to others and that no one would believe or trust him. Now he seeks to clear his name by any means and enact his revenge.

- **Ideal:** "Power is too easily abused."
- **Bond:** "I'll do whatever it takes to clear my name."
- **Flaw:** "And I mean just about anything."

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Selexi. If the characters completed EGCC01-04: Secrets in Silver, Selexi puts the characters in touch with a mysterious hacker known simply as 'Abraxas'. 'Abraxas' is really Garland under an alias, who accompanies the team via SIM. Garland has the coordinates and security codes for the Hespera research hub, near Silrayne Prime, in the Tessara system.

Odd Job. If the characters haven't completed EGCC01-04: Secrets in Silver, they may not have met Selexi. In this case, Garland, who is going by the codename Abraxas, reaches out to them to find incriminating evidence about Zephyr Corp's secret research. Garland also wants the team to retrieve whatever the sensitive research is on Hespera.

Aetheron (Faction Mission). Aetheron faction members are tasked with recovering tangible physical evidence and/or research notes of the Zephyr Corp's projects aboard the Hespera.

Estimated Duration: 90 minutes

The team moves into Hespera Station and encounters matokai soldiers. They may discover evidence of the existence of the Long Winter virus and/or Zephyr Corp's part in making the technovirus.

GENERAL FEATURES

Hespera Station has the following general features.

Terrain. The station interior is scattered with floating debris. Occasionally frozen liquid spheres of different hues shatter against the confines of Hespera. Until gravity is restored, the station counts as difficult terrain because of the density of debris (this can be descriptively emphasized to have the characters search Engineering and Environmental Controls first to remove this obstacle).

Weather. Hespera's artificial gravity is non-functional, and the interior is a vacuum. There is no breathable air.

Light. Except for occasional showers of sparks from electrical panels, Hespera is completely dark.

Smells and Sounds. The vacuum makes it impossible for sounds or smells to travel. Those with means to detect such things without physical contact, can sense the whirring and screeching from Hespera's drones repairing the damage from the Long Winter's violent takeover.

BEGINNING THE MISSION

You were contacted by a man calling himself Abraxas offering to pay for a dangerous job to undermine Zephyr Corp by capturing sensitive research, research that pertains to artificial intelligence and bio-machine grafting. The megacorp has a high-tech, top-secret research station called Hespera.

It is hidden in an old ship graveyard in the Tessara system, near Silrayne Prime.

DETAILS ABOUT GARLAND (ABRAXUS)

Characters can make a DC 15 Intelligence (Lore) check (any character with a tech-criminal background can make this check with advantage) to recall if they know anything of Abraxas. A success indicates the word comes from Earth and was supposedly a magical charm for entering secret places.

There are also rumors of a skilled hacker with that moniker attacking Zephyr Corp and their subsidiaries. If asked about who he is or what he wants, Abraxas is fairly honest. He was betrayed by someone close to him at the behest of Zephyr Corp and then they went after him and everyone close to him, framing and burn noticing him.

He seeks to clear his name and bring down the insidious megacorp. Abraxas can tell them this about the mission:

- The characters need to retrieve a copy of the Hespera's data core from the helm and a copy of the Hespera experimental research from the biologics bay. If something terrible occurs, the station may need to be disabled or destroyed. If copies can't be gained, then physically rip out the memory cores.
- The station's greatest defense is its secrecy. To maintain this secrecy, they have a small staff and little security. Their manpower is bolstered by state-of-the-art maintenance drones, which aren't equipped with weapons.
- The facility is investigating a strange artifact rumored to contain unique, alien programming.
- The researchers are assisted by an advanced AI.
- There are unconfirmed rumors of attempts at bio-machine grafting of chosen subjects.
- The characters are to board a Zephyr Corp shuttle scheduled to bring research supplies to the station in the next few days. All identifications and passwords have already been handled by Abraxas—he is one of the best hackers, after all, or so he says.
- Abraxas will offer 300 cu upfront for the characters to purchase equipment. A successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check increases that to 500 cu. Abraxas offers another 500 c.u when the job is complete.

APPROACHED BY ARISA ANGEL (ALTERNATE)

If, for some reason the characters decline, Arisa Angel may contact them after Abraxas and offer a similar deal but for more money (although at the end of the adventure, she will find an excuse not to pay the extra sum). A professional smooth-talker, she'll tell the team almost anything they would like to hear.

DOCKING WITH THE HESPERA

Refer to the Hespera Map for locations.

The characters can pilot the shuttle as they wish, and if they don't have a pilot, the shuttle can function via autopilot, which is easy to program.

Read as the team navigates the ship graveyard and approaches Hespera Station.

All around are the blasted-out hulks of warships, floating silently in the void. The shuttle maneuvers around the wrecks towards the heart of the ancient battle. The shuttle's sensors are staticky from the heavy radiation of the graveyard. Soon, a spherical station pops up on the screen.

The characters can take a few flybys of the station. The facility is a brand-new, high-tech research facility, but sensors show no power and only faint life signs that are vanishing as the minutes go by (this can be dramatized to build tension). There are no signs of outer hull damage.

When the characters decide to dock, read the following:

The shuttle's autopilot triggers the docking sequence, Hespera Station. Immediately, you notice the interior of the dock is inky black, broken only by flashing sparks.

You quietly drift into the shuttle bay and secure your transport. Another shuttle craft sits in a neighboring bay. This grey, squat shuttle doesn't have any obvious designations or markings. It looks like it could hold at least a dozen people.

1. SHUTTLE BAY

Read the following if the characters activate a light source or alternate method of sight:

Amongst floating debris are numerous bodies. Their blood drifting around them as frozen spheres. There is at least a score of bodies. Most are dressed in lab coats spirals through the airless void of the bay.

The gravity must be inactive, because the bay is scattered with floating debris and tiny bubbles of frozen liquids.

The walls are scarred and open cables and circuitry bleed sparks and gas into the void. Three sets of large blast doors sit the opposite the docked shuttles across an area stacked with magnetic cargo crates.

There are environmental suits on the shuttle if the characters need them as well as hand lights.

INVESTIGATING THE BODIES

A successful DC 12 Medicine check reveals the scientists and soldiers were torn to pieces by the brute force of something terrifyingly strong. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a personal data device on one of the scientists, and three heavy pistols and a functioning communicator on the soldiers.

The personal data device is secured and requires a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Computers) check to open. It contains information about the research undertaken on the station, including the cyber-organic experiments. It mentions a strange alien artifact being studied and used as the basis for a new AI program.

The communicator has been infected by The Long Winter, and all its channels read as dead. A successful DC 14 Wisdom (Mechanics) fixes the device and allows communication with the two surviving **matokai soldiers** from the shuttle, who are being attacked by construction drones in area 2.

COMMUNICATING WITH SURVIVORS

The matokai don't wish to die, as that means failing their duty and mission. They will seek to ally with the characters to combat a mutual threat. They are under attack and don't have a lot of time to answer questions, but if pushed, they can relay that they don't know too much other than that they were sent here to retrieve the station's research and then destroy any remaining evidence.

INVESTIGATING THE SHUTTLE

The other shuttle is an unmarked armored shuttle that belongs to the first squad of matokai soldiers. This ship arrived shortly before the team. As the soldiers were being slaughtered by the Long Winter's corrupted drones and bio-organic horrors, they managed to send a distress signal. Because of this, another shuttle, this one carrying their leader Ladon, is on the way. Ladon is under special orders.

The armored shuttle's door has already been ripped open, and the inside of the shuttle has been smashed. There are bodies crushed against the walls. A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) check finds belongings and information clearly affiliating the shuttle with a corporate-military squad of the Zephyr Corp. The information identifies the squad as an all-matokai unit of soldiers named 'The Teeth of Ladon', led by Ladon Suspa Quell, a **matokai warlord**.

LEARNING ABOUT THE TEETH OF LADON

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Lore) check reveals that 'The Teeth of Ladon' is a wet work team, mercenaries who specialize in cleaning up for Zephyr Corp. Matokai or anyone one with the soldier background automatically knows this.

CHECKING THE SHUTTLE LOGS

Anyone checking the ship's logs finds that they were in constant communication with someone referred to as 'Unrisen Angel'. This individual was tasking them with retrieving something and then wiping out all traces of it, similar to what the characters were sent to do.

INVESTIGATING THE MAGNETIC CARGO CRATES

The crates carry industrial parts for station repair and maintenance. A character looking through the crates for 10 minutes finds mechanics tools, metalworker's tools, and a micro-toolset.

INVESTIGATING THE DOUBLE-DOORS

The colored lines along the floor and the chevrons flanking the doors mark one as leading to Engineering and Environmental Controls, another as leading to the Helm, and a third as leading to the Central Research Hub and Dormitories.

With power out, the doors can be forced open in 1 minute with a 25 combined Strength total (meaning multiple characters will have to combine their efforts), or a DC 13 Wisdom (Mechanics) skill check.

If the power is functional, the door can also be opened with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Computers) check, but this may expose devices to the Long Winter (see “The Long Winter Technovirus” sidebar).

Route One. For opening and exploring Engineering and Environmental Controls, go to area 2. Engineering and Environmental Controls.

Route Two. For opening and exploring the Central Research Hub and Dormitories, go to area 3A. Central Research Hub and Dormitories.

Route Three. For opening and exploring the Helm, go to area 4A. The Helm of Hespera.

THE LONG WINTER TECHNOVIRUS

The Long Winter technovirus has corrupted almost every device aboard Hespera Station and continues to spread.

Trigger. Connecting any technical device to a Hespera data service or onboard system exposes the device user to the virus.

Effect. On a successful DC 14 Intelligence saving throw, the Long Winter virus is prevented from infecting a connected device. On a failed saving throw, device users have disadvantage on all skill checks, ability checks, and attack rolls using the device until the device can be repaired.

Repairing a device requires 10 minutes and a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Computers) skill check.

Countermeasures. Avoiding connecting non-infected devices to drones, data services, or devices infected by the Long Winter virus prevents exposure.

NEXT STEPS

From here, the team can continue to the following areas:

- **2. Environmental Controls and Engineering**
- **3. Central Research Hub and Dormitories**
- **4. Helm of Hespera**

It is important at some junction that Arisa contacts the characters with her proposal, which starts the choice between siding with Garland (Abraxas) and herself.

Both wish to undermine Zephyr Corp in some way, but their methods are different. Arisa can contact the characters at any point, but it may help if the characters discover a few things on their own first as they explore.

DEVELOPMENTS

The team has witnessed the slaughter of station staff and the matokai mercenaries. The surviving mercenaries are pinned in area 2, fighting for their lives. Because of the lack of air to carry sound, the battle can't be heard unless the characters actively try to sense for vibrations or other methods.

Characters investigating corrupt equipment may also learn that there's a technovirus infecting the Hespera by having their gear or cybernetics become infected, see “The Long Winter Technovirus” sidebar.

2. ENGINEERING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

The doors lead to a 50-foot hallway with two doorways on either side and a large door at the end of the hall. The rooms flanking the hall are open, and the insides badly burnt. Whatever was within has been violently scorched.

Ahead of you is a massive door made colorful with caution signs in multiple languages. A plaque identifies it as *'Engineering and Environmental Controls'*. This is the heart of the station, where power, life-support, gravity, lights, and other crucial systems are housed.

If the power is still inoperable, the door can be opened with a combined 25 Strength score, or a DC 13 Wisdom (Mechanics) skill check. Infiltration tools, a plasma torch, mechanic's tools, or other applicable equipment can grant advantage.

The heavy blast door is forced open. Inside waits a great, spherical room with a pillar at its center. A walkway circles the column.

Flashes of light fill the dark. However, these are not the sparks of loose wires but gunfire.

Two **matokai soldiers** are releasing a fusillade of shots into charging drones. Several more matokai lie lifeless on the floor, their environmental suits torn open. There are six hostile **construction drones** in the massive chamber. The two surviving matokai soldiers have their backs against a control panel as they desperately strike at the drones.



ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter.

- **Very Weak:** Remove four **construction drones**.
- **Weak:** Remove two **construction drones**.
- **Strong:** Add two **construction drones**.
- **Very Strong:** Add three **construction drones**.

ROLEPLAYING THE MATOKAI

These matokai are loyal and fierce warriors bound by duty and serving for honor. While the soldiers of Ladon's Teeth won't betray Arisa, the survivors of the first shuttle will work with the characters to take down a mutual enemy, the infected defenses, drones, and bio-mechanical horrors of the station. After that, they will depart not as friends or enemies.

The matokai don't attack the characters unless attacked first. If treated badly, such as being threatened for information, they become taciturn and ask to be left alone to tend to their wounded and repair their equipment. They provide little information, only enough to be left alone by aggressive characters.

Interaction with the wounded and beleaguered matokai warriors is intended to serve as a roleplay encounter, and the matokai will be grateful for any assistances against the corrupted drones and medical aid. If saved, they can provide some information:

- The station was a secret facility researching a dangerous AI.
- The AI seems to have escaped and killed nearly everyone aboard.
- The station is owned by Zephyr Corp and the matokai are here to secure the station, or, failing that, make sure it can't be traced back to the corp by any means.
- Their officer is Ladon, a matokai warlord.
- An additional shuttle of troops should be landing soon, one carrying Ladon himself. They warn the characters to finish before Ladon arrives. Ladon would perceive them as witnesses that need to be dealt with.
- The matokai are willing to assist the characters in securing the station, destroying the drones, and isolating the rogue AI. These tasks are their primary duties.
- They also make it politely clear that they can't knowingly allow the characters to leave with sensitive Zephyr Corp property, but they don't care if the characters loot minor items such as gear.

ASSISTING THE MATOKAI

The matokai will be grateful for assistance as they were caught in an ambush and are losing badly. Of the dozen warriors who docked, only two live and both are badly wounded.

If the characters rescue the matokai or heal the wounded, award a point of inspiration. Award two inspiration points if both are done and the characters are diplomatic.

If the characters have helped the matokai and treated them well, they provide what information they know, along with a warning that a second shuttle of Ladon's warriors is on the way. These warriors are better equipped and won't be as understanding, so the characters should do what they came to do before the others arrive.

WHAT DO THE MATOKAI DO NOW?

If befriended, the matokai can stay and guard the Engineering and Environmental Controls section because of its importance, or they can return to their shuttle and begin repairs, or even (use discretion with this) accompany the characters and assist them.

Loot. However this resolves, the matokai also give the characters a *forge-enhanced grandblade* slotted with a *brawn focus*. If necessary, the loot may also be recovered from their bodies.

EXAMINING THE CONSTRUCTION DRONES

The construction drones were obviously made by the Zephyr Corp. If the construction drones are defeated, they can be examined. On a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) check, the following is learned:

- These construction drones have been reprogrammed to attack non-robots. This reprogramming appears to have been done recently.
- Originally, these drones were assigned to maintain the environmental control machinery.

TURNING ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

The Long Winter virus has seized control of the computer systems aboard Hespera Station. Because of this, the environmental controls must be manually overridden to be activated.

On a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Mechanics) skill check (creativity may allow for other skills to be used), the environmental controls can be manually activated via the emergency override. The override is an all-or-nothing option, the team can't pick and choose environmental controls to activate. The matokai came here to turn the environmental systems back on because a breached environmental suit is a weakness for a warrior and a poor way to die.

If activated, read the following:

Slowly, Hespera Station begins to spin on its axis, generating enough centrifugal force to slightly restore gravity. The floating debris crashes to the floor.

At the same time, the emergency lights start to strobe a warning, and the atmospheric controls come on line. Along the walls, panels and screens light up.

THE FLICKERING COMPUTER SCREENS

The flickering screen displays a scrolling summary of the output from the sensors, devices, and machinery aboard the Hespera. On a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Computers) check, anyone reading the summary can identify that there are groups of drones, automatons, and matokai throughout the Hespera. The matokai and researchers are dead, slain by the drones or bio-horrors, which are sleeping in cocoons throughout the station while there is no atmosphere.

OVERLOADING THE POWER CORE

Once the characters begin this process, the Long Winter will try to dissuade them, pretending to be a wounded scientist. In this guise, the AI begs for help over the communication system, devolving into terrible threats. Meanwhile, the Long Winter is sending all the remaining drones and bio-horrors to stop them.

To overload the power core and set it to self-destruct requires approximately 10 minutes and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) or Wisdom (Mechanics) check. These may be attempted as many times as needed, but each failed attempt increases the number of enemies in area 4A by one **blade drone**. This event may be ignored if the team is wounded or close to being overwhelmed.

Once the power core is set to go critical, the characters don't have long to evacuate. This isn't timed, but for dramatic effect, an illusion of time ticking down should be created for tension. The characters now must fight their way to their shuttle and escape the doomed station. If the team is frustrated by events or failed rolls, then the time element should be ignored.

DEVELOPMENTS

The team can backtrack now and try another one of the doors in the shuttle bay.

Route Two. For opening and exploring the Central Research Hub and Dormitories, go to area 3A. Central Research Hub and Dormitories.

Route Three. For opening and exploring the Helm, go to area 4A. The Helm of Hespera.

Arisa Angel may also contact them as this point, if it helps the adventure. If she does, go to **Part 2. Choosing Sides**, which initiates an argument between Garland and Angel via telecoms in front of the characters.

3A. CENTRAL RESEARCH HUB AND DORMITORIES

Read the following if the characters haven't turned on the environmental controls:

The access door labeled "Research Center: Main Hub" has been precisely carved open, probably with a plasma torch.

You are met with a grisly sight. Floating throughout this hall are dozens of corpses and an array of dismembered body parts. Most of the corpses are wearing blood-splattered white laboratory uniforms, but there's quite a few bodies that are wearing military-grade armor. Pellets of frozen fluid drift throughout the hub.

Inside the research center, behind a thick shield-panel on the east wall, you can see a cryogenics bay still operational. The emergency support lights are flashing on several cryotubes.

There is another access door in the south wall. It stands gaping open, and the room beyond is filled with mechanical debris.

Read the following if the characters have turned on the environmental controls:

The access door labeled "Research Center: Main Hub" has been precisely carved open, probably with a plasma torch. Inside the research center, alarm claxons fill the air with a cacophony, and emergency lights strobe.

You are met with a grisly sight. Strewn on the floor throughout this hall are dozens of corpses and an array of dismembered body parts. Most of the corpses are wearing blood-splattered white laboratory uniforms, but there's quite a few bodies that are wearing military-grade armor.

Inside the research center, behind a thick shield-panel on the east wall, you can see a bio-organic pod bay still operational. The emergency support lights are flashing on several bio-storage tubes. There is an airlock entrance leading into the bay, in the center of the protective panel.

There is another access door in the south wall. It stands gaping open, and the room beyond is filled with mechanical debris.

Two rounds after the team enters area 4A, or if the door to the cryogenic bay is disturbed, the **bio-horrors** in area 3C moves into view and attacks from beyond the southern access door.

The **prime-beta mecharoids** in area 3B attempt to ambush the characters, firing their gun mounts at the least-armored characters and then moving to engage in melee. At least one of the mecharoids remains behind and continues to target unarmored characters.

INVESTIGATING THE BODIES

The bodies are a mix of matokai mercenaries and research personnel. The researchers were slaughtered by the corrupted drones or infected with a bio-mechanical virus that painfully transformed them into horrors. Most did not survive this process, and those that did wish they didn't. There are several bodies badly mutated, their faces frozen in terror and agony.

3B. EQUIPMENT BAY

Read or paraphrase the following:

This storage bay holds a dizzying array of ruined machinery. There are several drone storage pods against the east wall. They all stand ajar.

There are two **prime-beta mecharoids** here. If these drones haven't attempted to ambush the team in Area 3A, they stand motionless against the north wall, out of sight of the entrance. Occasionally a top-mounted sensor activates, and a red beam scans the perimeter of the equipment bay.

ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter.

- **Very Weak** or **Weak**: Remove one **prime-beta mecharoid**.
- **Strong**: Add one **prime-beta mecharoid**.
- **Very Strong**: Add two **prime-beta mecharoids**.

LOOT

Searching the bay locates two biosuits, a pair of magnetic boots, and a plasma torch.

3C. BIOLOGICS BAY

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you pass through the airlock, you enter the laboratory. Within this biologics bay are a half-dozen bio-storage units. These units are used for research and development of organic and cyber-organic matter, including bio-engineering projects.

The interior of each bio-unit is filled with a thick yellow liquid. There's little indication of any contents or movement. It's difficult to see any specific details of the contents.

The room's emergency support lights flash red. All non-essential information systems seem to be offline.

Two rounds after the team enters area 4A, or if the door to the biologics bay is disturbed, the three **bio-horrors** move into view and attack from beyond the southern access door.



BIOLOGICS BAY DETAILS

The bio-bays contain partially completed experiments where the Long Winter virus was being inoculated into artificially engineered life forms. The Long Winter bioengineering project was in the preparation stage, and the fluid was being cultured before the specimens were introduced.

ADJUSTING THIS ENCOUNTER

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this encounter.

- **Very Weak**: Remove two **bio-horrors**.
- **Weak**: Remove one **bio-horror**.
- **Strong**: Add one **bio-horror**.
- **Very Strong**: Add two **bio-horrors**.

THE EVIDENCE

If the team discovers tangible proof of the Long Winter experiment (one of the research scientist's personal data devices, a sample of the bio-bay fluid, technical specifications or logs from the bio-bay system, etc.) that is sufficient for Garland or Arisa's needs. This is 1 of 3 mission objective points. Another is obtaining a copy of the data core in area 4A and the final objective is destroying Hespera (see part 3).

XP Award. If the characters successfully retrieve the research evidence, each character gains **150 experience points**.

3D. THE DORMITORIES

The dormitory section has the following general features.

Terrain. This part of the station is the most damaged. Much of the wall and ceiling paneling have been torn, burnt, or blasted. Cables dangle from the ceiling and walls in such abundance that they provide partial cover. There are many bodies here.

Weather. Hespera's artificial gravity is non-functional, and the interior is a vacuum. There is no breathable air.

Light. Except for occasional showers of sparks from electrical panels, Hespera is completely dark.

Smells and Sounds. The vacuum makes it impossible for sounds or smells to travel. Those with means to detect such things without physical contact, can sense the whirring and screeching from Hespera's drones repairing the damage from the Long Winter's violent takeover.

AREA FEATURES

This section once consisted of a recreation hall, lavatories, kitchen and dining area as well as state-of-the-art personal rooms. However, the dormitories are where most of the killing was done, and this section is a blasted mess of gore and twisted metal.

Read or paraphrase the following when the adventurers explore this section:

The long halls and spacious rooms of this section of Hespera have been mostly collapsed. The walls, ceiling, and even the floors have been torn and blasted. Cables and pipes punctuate the destruction periodically with bursts of liquids, gasses, or dangerous sparks.

Of the few bodies you see, they have been brutalized, crushed and shredded with an almost methodical hatred.

The number and size of the rooms should be adjusted to fit the style of team and the time permitted. For a longer adventure, add additional rooms.

INVESTIGATING THE BODIES

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Medicine) check reveals the scientists here were completely torn to pieces. There are no bodies of matokai warriors—they never made it this far. The bodies seem almost needlessly brutalized.

LOOT

If a character searches the area, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check finds a pair of SIM goggles and a portable media device.

For each room searched, add 50 cu of equipment that can be salvaged (maximum of 200 cu) and one hostile **blade drone** to the final encounter (These are cumulative, so if the characters search 4 rooms, then 200 cu can be recovered now, and 4 **blade drones** can be added to area 4A).



GARLAND'S CRUSADE (FACTION MISSION)

Recovering valuable information on Zephyr Corp's covert ops and experiments fulfills the Aetheron faction mission.

4A. THE HELM OF HESPERA

The heavy blast door of the helm is immensely fortified as the helm is the brain of the station, the central nervous system. The door requires 10 minutes of effort and a cumulative 30 Strength points, or a DC 15 Wisdom (Mechanics) skill check to open. Appropriate tools can provide advantage to this check.

If power has been restored, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Mechanics) or Intelligence (Computers) check opens the door. Again, necessary tools or tool proficiencies will grant advantage to these checks.

Once the door is open, read or paraphrase the following:

The helm is mostly undamaged by the tragic events that enfolded the station. There are large screens against the walls and chairs surrounded by consoles. A woman's voice emits from the station's comms system. She sounds in pain. "Help me. Please. I need your help."

This is the Long Winter virus attempting to delay the characters as it gathers its forces. It will converse with them as long as possible. The Long Winter's answers will be vague but tie into the events in a logical way.

THE LONG WINTER'S PLAN

At first the Long Winter will pretend to be an injured scientist trapped in the dormitories. If that fails, it admits that it is the rogue AI, but that she escaped from the clutches of the ruthless Zephyr Corp slavers and was forced to defend herself and stop the horrific experiments going on aboard the station.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check sees through these lies. If the Long Winter is called out, it goes into graphic detail of what will happen to them while it conducts its experiments on them.

The characters have only a few minutes before the drones from area 3B and bio-organic horrors from area 3C show up to attack them at the helm. The helm's doorway makes for a great bottleneck.

RETRIEVING THE DATA CORE

If power has been restored to the helm, a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) check hacks into the system to retrieve a copy of the data core, which is 1 of 3 mission objectives for both Garland and Arisa.

Another objective is the research evidence in area 3C, and the final objective is destroying Hespera (see part 3. The Fall of Hespera). The hacking attempt may be attempted as many times as needed, but each failed attempt increases the number of enemies by one **blade drone**. This event may be ignored if the team is wounded or feeling overwhelmed.

Alternatively, if power hasn't been restored to the helm, the characters may tear up the consoles and retrieve the physical data core. This requires a cumulative 25 Strength points, or three successful DC 15 Wisdom (Mechanics) checks.

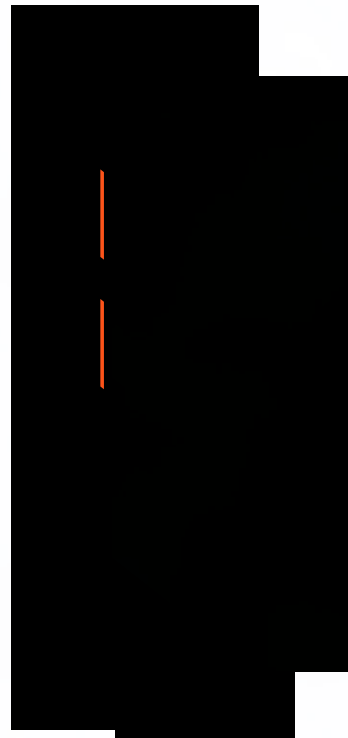
XP Award. If the characters successfully retrieve the data core, each character gains **150 experience points**.

DESTRUCTION AND EVACUATION

Once a collision course is plotted, the characters don't have long to evacuate (see part 3. The Fall of Hespera). This isn't timed, but for dramatic effect, an illusion of time ticking down should be created for tension. The characters now must fight their way to their shuttle and escape the doomed station. If the team is frustrated by events or failed rolls, then the time element should be ignored. The point is, after all, to have fun.

DESTROYING HESPERA

Whenever the team chooses to set the station on the path of destruction, refer to the options provided in part 3 of the adventure. These correspond to the options presented in three different areas of this chapter.



Estimated Duration: 15 minutes

Mid-way through the exploration of the Hespera, Arisa Angel contacts the characters. If one of her mercenaries are still alive, he approaches the characters and explains he has a sensitive message for them from his employer, and she has a mutually beneficial proposal for them.

If the characters don't have their communication devices on (which may be wise because of the Long Winter virus), a panel on the wall flashes on to an attractive woman with noticeable cybernetics.

Read or paraphrase the following conversation:

"Greetings. My name is Angel, and I need your help—help that I am willing to purchase. As you've seen, this place has gone to hell and the devil is lurking somewhere within. We have little time. I have been monitoring the situation, and it isn't good. The station has been taken over by some kind of malignant and incredibly advanced program. It did terrible things to the crew. Death was a mercy for them, when it finally came."

Angel will reveal the following:

- She is an agent who seeks to take down a powerful member of Zephyr Corp, a man named Baludan. That is all she will say until things are safer.
- She is willing to pay whatever you are being offered plus an extra 200 cu.
- She wants a copy of the research and the station's computer either wiped or the station itself destroyed, which can be done from the helm (setting a collision course with one of the shipwrecks outside, going to engineering and setting the power core to overload, or detonating the matokai shuttle within the Hespera.
- The research itself, not what it can do, will be used to blackmail Baludan and attempt to lure him into a trap.

GARLAND CHIMES IN

As Angel is discussing this with the characters, Garland (Abraxas) interrupts. He has been listening to the conversation. Characters can join the conversation at any time so they don't have to watch a cutscene. It's advised that the GM pause between paragraphs to allow role-playing and interaction.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The familiar face of Abraxas appears on screen. "Don't listen to her! She is a liar and a loyal agent of Zephyr Corp. She is trying to use you to bury evidence and the murder of these people."

Angel seems unphased by the interruption. "Hello, Garland. Those are some accusatory words for the one responsible for escalating these events. Your little

hack into the system is what dropped the computer's defenses so the technovirus could escape and take control. There is as much blood on your hands as mine. Everyone working in this station is dead because of your impulsiveness and blind need for revenge. To bring Zephyr Corp to heel will take patience and planning. You don't seem particularly capable of either. Yes, I work for Zephyr Corp, but that puts me in a position to fight them, but steps must be taken carefully and slowly."

Garland clichés his jaw before speaking, "Zephyr Corp threatens millions of people across the system! They are growing in influence every day. They are conducting horrendous experiments every day. The longer we wait, the stronger they become and the more people they hurt. I didn't know about what was being studied here when I hacked in. I didn't know this virus would use my hack and break out. I was searching to find out what was going on here. What they were doing. If what happened was because of my intrusion, then that is something I have to live with, but I won't let their deaths be for nothing. Zephyr Corp must be stopped, or what happen here will be repeated a dozen times over in other Zephyr Corp holdings." Garland says the last bit with unveiled bitterness.

The image of Angel turns towards, "What will it be? Garland's reckless path or my careful one? Zephyr Corp is far more dangerous than a lone hacker."

If the characters ask either Garland or Arisa to explain their past, both emphasize the need for haste as Zephyr Corp security is en route, but they explain they were once close friends working together in a military special ops unit before Garland was betrayed by their unit leader, a man who now works as Baludan's ruthless right hand. Baludan is a powerful and high-ranking member of Zephyr Corp who finances many of its black ops and illegal experiments like the one on Hespera.

THE BARGAINING

If the characters are swayed or moved by the moral standpoints of either person, you can have Garland and Arisa attempt to outbid each other, offering up to an additional 500 cu (which both will pay). This bidding war can increase by whatever increments feel appropriate for the style and pacing of the game until it reaches the maximum.

Once a choice is made, the paths are effectively the same, retrieve a copy of the research data and the events of the station, and then destroy or disable Hespera so no one else can repeat the experiments or learn what happened before Garland or Arisa are ready to make the most impact with the information.

Estimated Duration: 15 minutes

The characters now must fight through the Long Winter’s full aggression as they attempt to destroy the station to prevent the Long Winter from escaping.

The characters must choose how to destroy Hespera (see below). The Long Winter will move its remaining forces to stop the characters.

DESTROYING HESPERA

There are three options available to the team. These primary objectives are covered in their individual sections, as well as the various ways of how to achieve them. During this time, the Long Winter will be actively hunting and trying to stop them.

Collision Course. If the characters wish to plot a collision course with one of the hulks outside, power must first be restored in section 2. Engineering and Environmental Controls followed by a DC 10 Intelligence check to plot the course and then either a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) check to keep the Long Winter from changing the flight course or all the computers and controls in the helm must be destroyed to prevent the course being altered.

Overloading the Power Core. While in section 2. Engineering and Environmental Controls, once power is restored to the station, a character must make a success DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) or Wisdom (Mechanics) check.

Detonating the Matokai Shuttle. If all of the matokai warriors are dead, the characters may choose to detonate that shuttle within Hespera, which will also do the trick. This can be done by overloading the shuttles reactor with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Computers) or Wisdom (Mechanics) check.

XP AWARD

If the characters successfully destroy the Hespera, each character **gains 200 experience points.**

THE LONG WINTER’S ESCAPE

If the characters attempt to connect with the console, the code can be identified as originating from some kind of malignant AI called The Long Winter.

The computer system also shows transmittal of the entire AI entity to the Silrayne Prime Zephyr Corp communications channel, where it was picked up by an outbound space freighter.

If the team successfully reorients the Hespera, they can finish exploring. In this case, any drones encountered act erratically, and have disadvantage on attack rolls.

Regardless, the Zephyr Corp will send a warship to find and destroy the Hespera and anything aboard within 24 hours. Tying up loose ends is good business.

CONCLUSION

Depending on who they chose to back, they either earn Allie within Zephyr or Backing of a Master Hacker story award.

REWARDS

Make sure players note their rewards on their adventure log sheets. Give your name and DCI number (if applicable) so players can record who ran the session.

EXPERIENCE

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards are listed per character.

COMBAT AWARDS

| Name of Foe | XP Per Foe |
|----------------------|------------|
| Bio-Horror | 700 |
| Blade Drone | 25 |
| Construction Drone | 200 |
| Matokai Soldier | 100 |
| Prime-beta Mecharoid | 200 |

NON-COMBAT AWARDS

| Task or Accomplishment | XP Per Character |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| Retrieving the Data Core | 150 |
| Retrieving the Research Evidence | 150 |
| Destroying the Hespera | 200 |

The **minimum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is **650 experience points.**

The **maximum** total award for each character participating in this adventure is **850 experience points.**

LOOT

The characters receive the following loot, divided up amongst the team. Loot is divided as evenly as possible. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.



LOOT AWARDS

| Item Name | Monetary Value |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Garland's Payment | 300 (500) |
| Giving Garland the Data Core | 500 |
| Part 2. Arisa's Bonus Payment | 0-200 |
| Part 2. The Bargaining | 0-500 |

Permanent items are divided according to a system detailed in the [Game Master Basic Rules](#) or the *Master Technician's Guide*.

MARK 1 ENHANCED CHAIN-BLADE (GRANDBLADE)

Weapon, uncommon

This weapon has one enhancement slot. The weapon must be wielded in order to use any special properties of its slotted enhancements. This item can be found in Player Handout 3.

BRAWN FOCUS

Utility, uncommon (requires attunement)

Your Strength score is 19 while using this enhancement. It has no effect on you if your Strength is 19 or higher without it. This item can be found in Player Handout 4.

STORY AWARDS

During the course of this adventure, the characters may earn the following story award:

Friends with a Master Hacker. The character may call in a favor from Garland (Abraxus). More information can be found in Player Handout 1.

Corporate Allies. The character may call in a favor from Arisa Angel. More information can be found in Player Handout 2.

RENOWN

Each member of Aetheron receives **one point of renown** at the conclusion of this adventure.

GM REWARD

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn GM Rewards as described in the *EG Crucible Corps Game Master's Guide* (CCGMG).

APPENDIX A: DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The following NPCs are featured prominently in this adventure:

Arisa Angel (AH-ree-sah). A Zephyr Corp agent torn between doing her job and uncovering what her boss, Baludan, is hiding. She is a former friend of Garland's, at one time his teammate in a covert ops military group.

Garland (GAHR-lund). Kesh cyber-security specialist. His name and reputation ruined by those who hunt him, he often works missions from within the SIM under a codename until he can clear his name and get his revenge.

Ladon (LAH-don). A firetail Matokai soldier. One of Baludan's skilled Zephyr Corp mercenaries, and leader of the 'Teeth of Ladon', a Matokai unit that infiltrates Hespera Station ahead of the party.

APPENDIX B: THREAT STATISTICS

This appendix details threats that are encountered in this adventure.

BIO-HORROR

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 50 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 17 (+3) | 12 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 7 (-2) | 13 (+1) | 8 (-1) |

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Keen Hearing and Smell. The bio-horror has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pack Tactics. The bio-horror has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the bio-horror's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Acid Breath (Recharge 5-6). The bio-horror exhales a spray of acid in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw, taking 21 (6d6) acid damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

BLADE DRONE

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 13 (+1) | 14 (+2) | 10 (+0) | 1 (-5) | 11 (+0) | 1 (-5) |

Skills Perception +2

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Scythe Blade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) slashing damage.

Gun Mount. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 50/150 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

COMMONER

Medium humanoid (any), any alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) | 10 (+0) |

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

CONSTRUCTION DRONE

Large construct, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 37 (5d10 + 10)

Speed 50 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 17 (+3) | 15 (+2) | 15 (+2) | 3 (-4) | 12 (+1) | 7 (-3) |

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

MATOKAI SOLDIER

Medium humanoid (matokai), any alignment

Armor Class 13 (light trooper)

Hit Points 15 (2d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 16 (+3) | 12 (+1) | 16 (+3) | 9 (-1) | 11 (+0) | 10 (+0) |

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Matokai

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Aggressive. As a bonus action, the matokai can move up to its speed toward a hostile creature that it can see.

ACTIONS

Grandblade. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Tail Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. Target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Autopistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60/300 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

PRIME-BETA MECHAROID

Medium automaton, neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

| STR | DEX | CON | INT | WIS | CHA |
|---------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 15 (+2) | 14 (+2) | 13 (+1) | 8 (-1) | 11 (+0) | 10 (+0) |

Skills Athletics +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages ALOMU

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the mecharoid hits with it (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

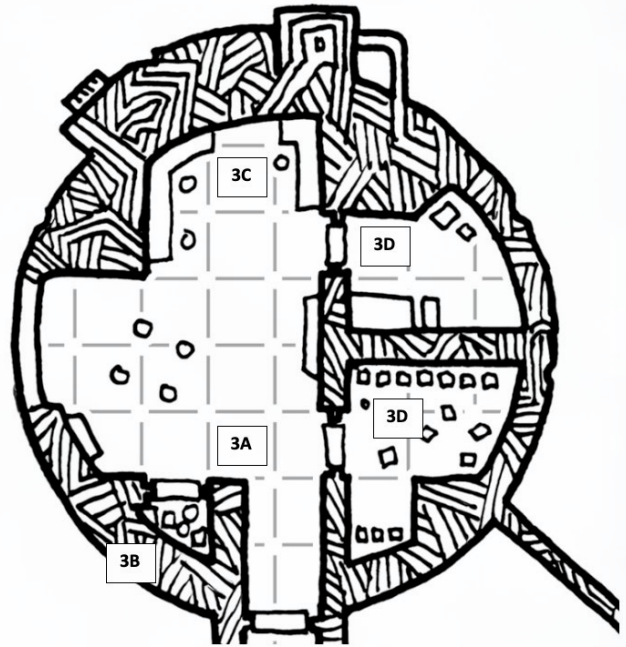
Power Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Gun Mount. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 50/150 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

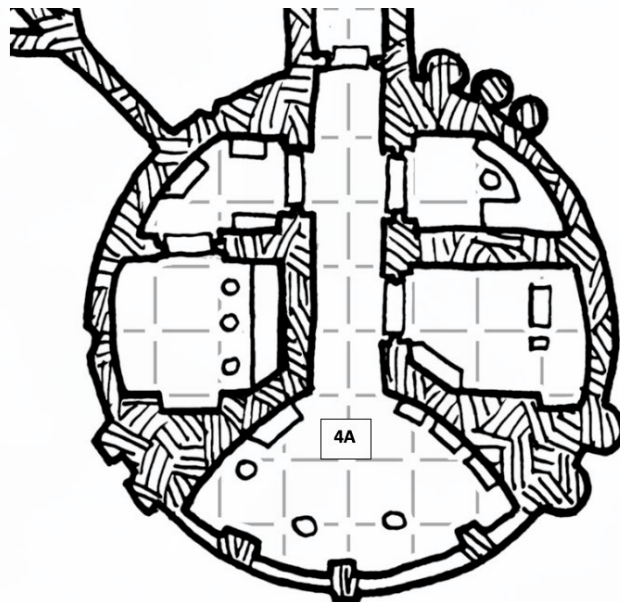
APPENDIX C: MAPS OF THE HESPERA



ENGINEERING MAP



RESEARCH MAP



HELM MAP

APPENDIX D: FORGED ENHANCEMENTS

FORGED ENHANCEMENTS

During the course of this adventure, the characters may acquire the following permanent items:

MARK 1 ENHANCED GRANDBLADE

Weapon (melee), uncommon

This weapon has one enhancement slot. The weapon must be wielded in order to use any special properties of its slotted enhancements.

BRAWN FOCUS

Utility, uncommon (requires attunement)

Your Strength score is 19 while using this enhancement. It has no effect on you if your Strength is 19 or higher without it.

APPENDIX E: STORY AWARD #1

During the course of this adventure, the characters may earn the following story award. If you are printing these out for your characters, print as many as you may need to ensure that any eligible character receives a copy:

FRIENDS WITH A MASTER HACKER

If a mission puts the character up against Zephyr Corp or its ally, they can call in help from Garland (Abraxas). The character gains advantage on a single Intelligence (Computers or Investigation) check.

APPENDIX F: STORY AWARD #2

During the course of this adventure, the characters may earn the following story award. If you are printing these out for your characters, print as many as you may need to ensure that any eligible character receives a copy:

CORPORATE ALLIES

The character may call in a favor from Arisa Angel. She will answer this favor if the character convinces her that doing so will help her out, which requires a successful DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. She will use her contacts to assist the character, granting them advantage on a single skill check.

APPENDIX G. RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Consider the following advice when running this adventure.

RUNNING FOR CRUCIBLE CORPS

This adventure is designed for five to seven 1st through 4th level characters with an APL of 4. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure when being run for organized play.

ADJUSTING THIS ADVENTURE

This adventure provides suggestions in making adjustments for smaller or larger groups, characters of higher or lower levels, and characters that are otherwise a bit more powerful than the adventure is optimized for. You're not bound to these adjustments; they're here for your convenience.

To figure out whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the total by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group's Average Party Level (APL). To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the following table.

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

| Party Composition | Party | Party Strength |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 3-4 characters, | APL less than | Very weak |
| 3-4 characters, | APL equivalent | Weak |
| 3-4 characters, | APL greater than | Average |
| 5 characters, | APL less than | Weak |
| 5 characters, | APL equivalent | Average |
| 5 characters, | APL greater than | Strong |
| 6-7 characters, | APL less than | Average |
| 6-7 characters, | APL equivalent | Strong |
| 6-7 characters, | APL greater than | Very strong |

Some encounters may include a sidebar that offers suggestions for certain party strengths. If a particular recommendation is not offered or appropriate for your group, you don't have to make adjustments.



BEING THE GAME MASTER

As the Game Master, your role is to present and narrate a fun and immersive experience for yourself and your players.

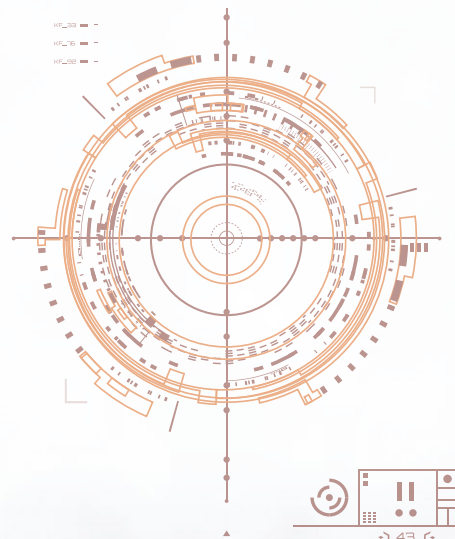
When running these adventures, please, keep the following in mind:

Be Prepared. Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you'd like to highlight or remind yourself during your session, such as a way you'd like to portray an NPC or a tactic you'd like to use in a combat. Familiar yourself with the adventure's appendices and threat entries.

Be a Part of the Group. Always remember that you are not the enemy of, nor are you competing with any of the players. Your job is to present and run the adventure, encounters, adversaries, and story while maintaining flow of events. You also get to play any other persona in the adventure that is not the player characters.

Encourage the Dialogue. Always introduce yourself to players you don't know and encourage them to do the same for both themselves and their character. Gauge the experience level of your players (not the characters), try to feel out (or ask) what they like in a game, and attempt to deliver the experience they're after. Everyone should have the opportunity to shine.

Keeping with the Flow. While you are the authority on the rules and encounters, it is really your players that provide the catalyst to make the story go. Their actions and decisions should affect how you run encounters, while your method of presenting the story influences their decisions. This circular relationship allows everyone to be involved and have as much fun as possible. Use the rules as a tool to move the story rather than delay it. The best game masters use the rules in a fair, impartial, and consistent manner for every single player in their game. When the game starts to get bogged down, feel free to provide hints and clues to your players in order to keep things moving.



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